

Illinois



ILLINOIS IS FOCUSED ON IMPLEMENTING early childhood systems reform that will lead to an increase in the number of children—especially children with high needs—who enter kindergarten ready to engage in a challenging curriculum. To achieve its goals and in recognition of the current system's needs, the state's early childhood reform agenda is organized around three strategic priorities: (1) deepening the integration of state supports to create a unified framework for all early learning and development (ELD) systems; (2) connecting the most at-risk children with the services and supports they need; and (3) increasing the quality of both learning environments and instruction in early learning and development programs (from “adequate” to “good” and from “good” to “great”). These strategic priorities cut across various sections of this plan, and collectively build toward the state's vision for an integrated system including quality universal and targeted supports for all children from birth to kindergarten entry and beyond.

Strategic Reform Priority #1: Deepening the integration of state supports to create a unified framework for all early learning and development programs

Illinois will implement a governance structure to support greater integration across the multiple funding streams and agencies involved in early childhood. The Leadership Team and the Inter-Agency Team will meet regularly to develop an integrated approach to supporting high-quality ELD Programs and to review progress in meeting the performance measures outlined in this grant. Staff in the Office of Early Childhood Development in the Office of the Governor will lead Interagency Project Teams focused on quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) implementation, workforce development, community collaboration, and data and outcomes measurement to ensure maximum coordination and integration of efforts across agencies.

Applicant

Office of the Governor,
State of Illinois

Lead Agency

Illinois State Board of
Education

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Total Federal Award

\$52,498,043

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January 1, 2013 –
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The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) discretionary grant program supports states in building statewide systems that raise the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children with high needs, so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Information in this abstract is drawn from the state's RTT-ELC grant application.

Key aspects of integration include the following:

- The new QRIS that will include all ELD programs serving children in groups, including child care centers and homes, Preschool for All, center-based Prevention Initiative programs, center-based Head Start / Early Head Start programs, and preschool special education
- A new statewide website that will provide parents with information about all programs in the QRIS, and a public awareness campaign that will inform parents about how to use the new quality ratings as they select early education and care programs for their children
- A validation study of the QRIS that includes child outcomes to help inform the continual improvement of this system
- A comprehensive statewide plan for supporting professional development for early childhood educators that incorporates all state-funded supports and, to the extent possible, supports provided through Head Start / Early Head Start programs and local-level entities such as school districts
- Use of a common statewide instrument for assessing children across the kindergarten year, the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey
- Data systems that track the services that children and families receive, children's learning and development outcomes, program quality features, and early childhood educators' credentials
- Use of the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards throughout all early learning and development programs in the state

Strategic Reform Priority #2: Connecting the most at-risk children with the supports and services they need

In its Phase 1 application, Illinois proposed to implement a comprehensive community collaboration model in 15 concentrated high need communities and to provide significant annual funding to these communities to support local collaborative work. With the reduced funding available, this approach is not feasible. Nevertheless, the state recognizes the need to support emerging local collaborations that are focused on ensuring that children with the highest needs are connected with high-quality early learning and development services.

To effectively build on its current Early Childhood Action Partnership initiative, Illinois will implement a scaled-down version of the Consortium for Community Systems Development (CCSD) to provide training, technical assistance, and supportive materials to local collaborations, building upon the success of the Early Childhood Action Partnership initiative.

Part of the work of the CCSD will be to assist local communities in developing philanthropic and other local resources to support collaborative efforts, a strategy which has proven effective and sustainable in several communities across the state.

Strategic Reform Priority #3: Increasing program quality: from adequate to good and from good to great

Illinois will implement the following strategies:

- Adding an additional 16 full-time (FTE) quality specialists across the 16 regional Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, and providing intensive training and support to both new and existing quality specialists in how to effectively support programs' quality improvement efforts
- Developing and providing trainings related to the requirements of the QRIS and/or the required competencies for credentials in the Gateways to Opportunity credentialing system
- Supporting the development of new coursework and training models and strengthening institute of higher education (IHE) faculty knowledge and skills in the critical areas of early math, use of assessment and standards to drive instruction, and supporting English language learners in early childhood
- Ensuring that early learning is included in major statewide efforts to strengthen the quality of instruction in the K12 system, including the Center for School Improvement and the Illinois Shared Learning Environment